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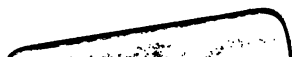
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GOSSIP



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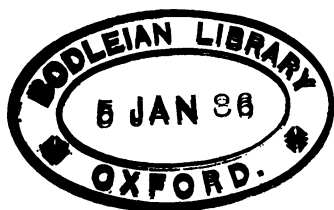
*EARTHLY THOUGHTS ON HEAVENLY
SUBJECTS.*

**Suggested by the Collects appointed to be used on Sundays
and Holy Days throughout the Christian Year.**

FIRST SERIES.

From Advent Sunday to Septuagesima Sunday.

LONDON :
JAMES NISBET & CO., 21 BERNERS STREET.
MDCCCLXXXV.



P R E F A C E.

“GOSSIP” may appear a somewhat flippant title for the exchange of serious thoughts on serious subjects, but it has been adopted for two reasons. First, on account of the unconventional and slightly secular tone of the little discourses; and, secondly, because of the epistolary form in which they are delivered.

The *tone* has been chosen in the hope that it may prove the echo of a “lost chord” in hearts still unattuned to “the melodies of the everlasting chime.”

The *form* is moulded after the pattern of a woman who, deprived of her best earthly

counsellor and friend, seeks to span the gulf of loss and absence with a Bridge of Spiritual Communion, upon which she may often cross to the "City of love and light and song," and there meet in spirit the absent beloved one.

The blocks with which she first begins to build are the feelings of human affection, which the wise Master-Builder chisels into shape by pain and joy, until they become meet for His own Temple. The aim of the "GOSSIP" is twofold: to mingle a much-loved portion of the Church of England Services with the current of everyday life; and to represent an earthly friendship in such a way as to show how comparatively lukewarm is the love frequently offered to God.

Thus earthly and heavenly thoughts are made to act and react upon each other, and the tiny seed of good in the former, is made to germinate in the soil of the latter, in order that it may bear fruit to the honour

and glory of the Husbandman, who is the Sower of all good seed in the world. Much has already been written on the Collects, theological, explanatory, and practical, but in the present little volume the intention has not reached higher than to extract from each Collect *an ordinary earthly thought*, and lift it heavenward.

Much also has been written on the "*expulsive power*" of strong affection; but in the following letters there is an attempt to infuse a *heavenly attraction* into human love.

We live in a world where love and tears dwell very near each other, and it was in a meeting between them that this "GOSSIP" was first suggested. If it should serve to help any of God's loving but tearful children, or to soothe "the pain of finite hearts that yearn," or to increase the joy of such as are already singing and making melody to God, the Author's aim will be accomplished, and all praise shall be to Him

“who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Cor. i. 4).

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ABSENCE AND RETURN.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty to judge both the quick and dead, we may rise to the life immortal, through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, now and ever. Amen.

Collect for the first Sunday in Advent.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Only a few hours have passed since I saw you set off on your long journey, but I can find no better employment at the present moment than to sit down and write to you. I once paid a visit to a pleasant old Vicarage in the North of England, brightened by the presence of a large blithe-hearted family. When the daylight closed in, the whole family gradually assembled in the cosy

drawing-room, to enjoy the firelight, and its accompanying luxury of doing nothing. Then the dear duty-loving mother, after hearing the adventures of the day, would suggest that it was time to ring for lamps, and put an end to the general idleness of the hour. But the eldest girl, in playful remonstrance, invariably quoted one or other of the following verses, which she knew her mother always loved to hear :—

“No, leave the lamp unlighted, the twilight hour
is sweet,
It brings back vanished voices, and the sound of
parted feet :
The soft grey light so tender, speaks the decline of
day,
And oh ! it recalls the memory, of friends who
have passed away.
The busy cares of lifework, that meet them as we
may,
Must oft times bring disquietude—fade with the
fading day ;
And the quiet hour of twilight suggesteth thoughts
of peace,
An earnest of that happy time when mortal
sorrows cease.
I hear the sound of voices, just as I used to hear,
I see familiar faces, of friends once known and
dear :

You tell me it is fancy ! perhaps it may be so,
But it soothes my earthborn spirit, this feeling of
 long ago.
Sweet memories round me gather, of gentle deeds
 and kind ;
And oft a pang of sad regret will steal across my
 mind,
As thoughts of all I might have done, in days that
 now are past,
Wail in a dirgelike melody, the hours that flew so
 fast.
And soft is the visioned splendour that breaks on
 my spirit's sight,
Faint glimpse of a purer, better world, as a dream
 in the dreamy light.
I love the dim grey twilight, oh ! leave me to its
 power,
To the good and tender influence of the solemn
 twilight hour."

And thus I learned the sweet words which
haunted me this evening, as I sat alone in
the autumn twilight of this brief November
day. You will guess, dear, that to *you*
belonged the "parted feet," and "vanished
voice," which the soft grey twilight brought
back to me.

Yet it was only this morning we parted,
and my "night of loss," is only casting its
first shadows over me.

I daresay you will remember, that Thomson, in describing the pleasures of winter, numbers among them that of holding "high converse with the mighty dead," in the cosy region of a warm, well-lighted, well-filled library, during the long evenings. I have been thinking, that as the night of our separation will be long—a winter's night in fact to me—I must try and make it a time of communion with all among the living or the dead who can best cheer, and improve, and wile away the hours, till the glad morning of our re-union.

You will be absent a whole year!—Some one has said, "*L'absence est comme la mort, pour tous ceux qui s'aiment;*" and after bidding you farewell this morning, no words expressed my feeling better, till I recollected a sentiment of Kingsley's—much truer on the whole, and with a reveille of hope which the first lacks. For Kingsley suggests both use and profit in absence, when he says that it "*quicken[s] love into consciousness.*"

I must tell you how the truth of his words came home to me. You know that at the farthest extremity of the lawn, opposite

the study window, are two splendid plane trees. Many a time have we together enjoyed the shade of their leafy foliage in summer, or feasted our eyes on the changeful beauty of their autumnal colouring. To-day the branches bear no trace of summer luxuriance, or autumn glory. Did I grieve when I looked at them this evening? Did they serve to remind me that you like the leaves had departed, leaving but the memory of love's sunshine, and warmth, and beauty, to cheer me during the winter of your absence? No, dear—for they helped me to realise how "Absence may quicken love into consciousness," and my thoughts grew full of gladness, and hope, and peace.

The day was nearly over, but the light of the sun still lingered; giving, as it were, good-night kisses of peace to the drowsy earth, leaving their impress in golden patches here and there,—while to the west of the trees, the silver crescent of a new moon shone radiantly fair. High against the background of the evening sky rose the massive trunks and giant branches of the trees, till they culminated in the most exquisite net-

work of delicate twigs, rounded off by an outline so perfect, that I lost myself in admiration over it. The beauty and peacefulness of the whole scene had a soothing effect upon me, and under "the good and tender influence of the solemn twilight hour," the quickening power of absence made itself felt, and awoke me to the consciousness of many things besides Love. The sun had vanished—but the moon, in his presence, could not have displayed the soft brilliance she had borrowed from him.

The absence of the trees' rich foliage revealed the hidden beauty of the stems and branches. Thanks also to the removal of that leafy screen, the whole view gained a touch of humanity, which pointed me beyond the near horizon of selfish affection. For now that the trees are leafless, I can discern a farm and its busy inhabitants, on a hill at a little distance. Thus Absence made me conscious of at least three things :—

That God can lighten our darkness, even when we are temporarily deprived of the sun.

That if He strip life of some beautiful

gifts, He can, and *does* endow it with others.

That when He removes from us one thing, it may be in order to reveal other claims upon our love and sympathy.

These reflections calmed my troubled thoughts, but the gladness which followed, came among the noiseless footsteps of the "dusky sandalled eve." For this is no ordinary eve. To-morrow will be Advent Sunday, and in every Christian night-watcher, throughout the length and breadth of the land, there should be a thrill of joyous expectation. And as from Absence springs the intense happiness of an anticipated reunion, may we not also find in the present darkness of loss and loneliness, an earnest that to every night shall dawn a morning—that what we lose for holy duty, or sweet love's sake, we shall surely find again,—and that to every lonely heart, "the Friend above all others," is on His way?

With hopes such as these ought we to find the night watches of life altogether dreary? Oh no! let us look around and see how much light, and warmth, and beauty,

PLACIDA'S GOSSIP.

God daily provides, even during the absence of that which we desire most. The sweet message of Advent will ring out in many a church bell to-morrow. Coming—a morning of re-union when we shall see and hear better than ever. Coming—a life no longer stripped bare, but budding, and blossoming, and bearing fruit abundantly. Coming—a fellowship and communion that nothing on earth can break. And oh! what immeasurable joy is in the thought that *you* are coming to me!

But what is this I hear you whispering to me in the twilight, as if you had already entered the spirit-land, and knew my thoughts? Ah! your question goes to my heart, and sends me to my knees for pardon, for I know what you mean when you ask me, “Are you *looking back* to watch for *my* coming, when the cry is in our ears, ‘Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet *Him*’?” I meet your rebuke with the silence of a self-convicted conscience, but it shall do its good work in the heart of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

LETTERS.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience, and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Collect for the second Sunday in Advent.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I have heard that Shakespeare's Works, and the Bible, have often been looked upon as companion volumes; and I hope you will not think me profane if I express the opinion, that Shakespeare does indeed afford some of the best illustrations of Bible truths.

But I was myself a little surprised this morning to find some of Shakespeare's words shedding new light on a portion of the Collect for to-day.

I had been thinking of the patience and comfort which "the blessed hope of everlasting life," is sure to give, if really embraced and held fast. Then pondering on the injunction to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" the Scriptures, Shakespeare's words flashed into my mind—"let good digestion wait on appetite, and health on both."

In this wish, "*appetite*" is made the forerunner of "good digestion," and there is a verse in the 65th Psalm which appears to me to convey a very similar idea—"Thou visitest the earth and waterest it, *after Thou hadst made it to desire rain.*"—(Marg.)

The desire or appetite must exist, before its satisfaction can yield either benefit or pleasure. In order to really enjoy food, there should be a certain amount of hunger for it; and the same may be said with regard to intellectual or spiritual appetite.

I am always hungry for a letter from you; the mere sight of one sharpens my appetite, and when the cover is removed, I am eager to begin the feast. I know that my thirst for the good, the beautiful, the true, will always be in large measure satisfied by you;

—my mind will be strengthened by your intellectual vigour ;—my imagination will be fed by the scenes you describe to me ; and my heart will devour all your assurances of personal love and sympathy. But while I am writing thus to you, dear, you seem to be whispering to me, “Have you always this hunger for God’s letters to you? Are His words indeed ‘sweet to your taste,’ and does your soul thirst for Him? His good news comes from a land that is very far off, towards which we ourselves are journeying day by day. Are we longing to get all the information we can about it, and eager to see the King who dwells there in His beauty? How full of love, real, personal, unchanging love, are the King’s letters and messages to us: what deep, wide-reaching thoughts do they contain; how vividly are men, and nations, and lands, and scenes depicted in them. Shall we not desire that the sight of these precious letters may awaken in us an ever-increasing appetite, and be more eagerly read than the sweetest love-letters that ever were penned?”

“Yes, indeed, dear, I will join in the

prayer, and whenever I receive one of your much-coveted letters, may it serve to remind me of the lesson I have just learned."

After this digression, I hardly care to return to the subject with which I began this letter, but I was about to observe, that I think it is well now and then to inquire into the state of one's intellectual appetite,—whether it be hearty and healthy.

We know how materially the body is affected by food, and no less certainly is the mind influenced by the mental aliment it receives. Therefore in catering for intellectual food, our first care should be to see that it be wholesome, for many a fine mind has been ruined by a pernicious diet. Not to speak of the actual poison willingly imbibed by such as are afflicted with a depraved appetite, it is well to avoid all dishes that are highly seasoned with the follies, frailties, or vices of mankind. And at every feast, spread for the nourishment or gratification of intellectual life, surely the Bread of Life should find a place. For it is that sweet Bread, which in the midst of the world's

luxurious living, prevents satiety, and keeps the taste pure and simple.

And when the appetite is hearty and wholesome, and only gratified lawfully and judiciously, it is also necessary to give heed that "good digestion" waits on it. Digestion carries on the work of assimilation whereby the wonderful transmutation is effected of *yours* into *you*, and *mine* into *me*. For after all it is the *being*, which results from *having*, that is the essential outcome of existence.

Our mortal frames are outward and visible signs of bodily appetite, food, and digestion ; —our spirits will be everlasting witnesses of our moral desires, aliment, and power of assimilation.

I often think I might say of your dear letters that to read them "is a liberal education," for they draw out my ignorance, and then fill the vacuum with all manner of "precious and pleasant riches," from your stores of knowledge. A letter from you generally sends me to my bookshelves ; but for the future, whenever I receive one, I will lay it beside God's letters, and make it a test of my spiritual appetite, by asking myself,—

“Which of these letters do I most long to read,” mark, learn, and inwardly digest? I know, dear, that you will pray that the *best* may be the one most thankfully and eagerly taken, and prove the sweetest to—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

MINISTRY AND STEWARDSHIP.

O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare thy way before thee ; Grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the third Sunday in Advent.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Is it allowable to put aside for a moment the primary meaning of the prayer in to-day's Collect,—“ that the ministers and stewards of God's mysteries may prepare and make ready His way ? ”

If so, I should like to share with you some secondary thoughts upon it. I leave out altogether the original signification of the word *mystery*, and use it only in its current

acceptation, as meaning something hidden, unexplained. And I extend the office of "ministers and stewards" to all who are made "kings and priests unto God," through the redemption wrought by "Him that loved us." Then arises the thought, that we ourselves are constituted ministers and stewards of God's mysteries, in order to prepare hearts for the reception of Jesus.

But what are the hidden mysterious stores, wherewith as good stewards we are to minister to others?—"not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Here is a list of some:—"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." For all these mysteries exist in human hearts, and are among the stores or fruits which nourish the inner, hidden life of man.

Who can solve the mystery of Love—the choicest fruit in Life's banquet? How little is really known of its birth, its growth, its life; or stranger still—why it sometimes becomes involved in the mystery of Death. For Love in this life is sometimes dissolved, *like the earthly house of our spirit*; and

instead of being "clothed upon" with a divine perfection, it is "unclothed,"—despoiled of former beauty, and left to all appearance dead. Yet the love that is born of God only passes through death in order to shake off some corruptible bondage, and emerge in a higher form to a nobler life. The sweetest honey may cloy or become unfit for "human nature's daily food," but God has given love to nourish and strengthen the children of men. We should desire an abundant store of it, that as stewards we may distribute it liberally to a love-needy world, as an earnest of God's inexhaustible store, from which we ourselves received it.

I also think that God intends us to be ministers of joy to each other. If with joy we have ourselves drawn happiness from "the wells of salvation," we shall have the wherewithal to fill many cups of blessing, and it becomes part of our stewardship to offer joy to other thirsting souls. It is a good thing to resolve every day to try and make some one happy, and to ask every night, "Have I missed any opportunity to-day of spreading joy in the world?"

Peace is a very precious spiritual fruit, but it does not always admit of distribution. It is more difficult to obtain, and is frequently lost, and God seldom gives more than enough for each steward's own need. But around the possessor there is a fragrance, an atmosphere which is perceptible to others, and often exercises a soothing influence over troubled souls. And it is sometimes possible to give peace by means of forgiveness, or timely help, or reassuring love. A steward of God's mysteries would run the risk of forfeiting his own portion of peace with God, if he neglected to minister from his own hidden store, to a restless or suffering heart.

I feel sure that we may earnestly covet large supplies of meekness and longsuffering, for our neighbours demand them constantly at our hands, and we cannot bestow them too freely.

The same may be said of gentleness, goodness, faith, and temperance,—they are all precious stores which God's stewards and ministers should seek to accumulate.

The more abundant the provision, the more generously should it be shared by all

who desire to be "good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

"Say, dear, shall we try and make it a habit to look through these our hidden stores every night, to take stock of them, as it were, and see that our supply is equal to the demand?"

I need not ask you, for I am sure that of your own accord you will pray that a large supply of these stores may be granted to—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THE RACE SET BEFORE US.

O Lord, raise up (we pray thee) thy power, and come among us, and with great might succour us; that whereas, through our sins and wickedness, we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us, thy bountiful grace and mercy may speedily help and deliver us; through the satisfaction of thy Son our Lord, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the fourth Sunday in Advent.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

There is a sentence in the Collect for to-day which I think must come home to many hearts, as it does to mine. It is this: "Through our sins and wickedness we are sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before us." Knowing, feeling, mourning over this sad fact, are we careful enough to lay aside the weights that hinder us and prevent our

grasping the Hand outstretched to sustain and aid us in our running? On the contrary, I fear that a wish to display our own strength often leads us to refuse or overlook the Hand, and burden ourselves with many an unnecessary load.

It has been said that the four letters of the word RACE, may severally stand for the Runners, the Aim, the Course, and the End.

Now surely among the characteristics of the *Runners* should be found simplicity of purpose, perseverance, energy, and temperance.

But a great many would-be runners are, like ourselves, from among the wealthy classes, and I cannot deny that there is a great lack of simplicity in the artificial life we lead in the present day. This lack, paradoxical as it may sound, imposes burthens which are sore hindrances in running the race set before us. The costly extravagances of fashion's caprice, banish simplicity from dress, food, and manners, and the frivolous and exciting amusements of modern society vitiate the taste for the simple pleasures of Nature.

Then is it any wonder that with the

tyrannical goddess of Fashion on one hand, soul-deadening luxury on the other,—and the temptations of the world's Vanity Fair all around,—many a runner finds his course impeded?

Moreover, without simplicity of purpose there can be no definite Aim in life. Should not our aim simply be, to glorify God and fulfil His will? Yet how mixed are all our purposes, and how we entangle ourselves with aims so low, that they do not even reach as high as the stature of a noble man, much less to the height of Him “Who sitteth above the waterfloods.”

We want to be rich, or famous, or powerful, or clever, but we do not lift our eyes high enough to aspire to be holy. We hang our mixed motives, our petty ambitions, and grovelling desires all about us, and then venture to bewail that we are “sore let and hindered” in running our appointed race.

The *Course*, though extending all the way from earth to heaven, is simple and direct, for it lies along the straight path of duty to God and our neighbour. But it is not always easy to follow, for it leads over many

a hill of difficulty, and is often rough with stones of stumbling, and sometimes checked by the waters of Marah.


Shall we lie down indolently at the foot of the toilsome ascent—angrily kick against the stumbling-blocks—and take no trouble to find the tree that will either sweeten or bridge over the bitter waters? To act thus is to make our own hindrances, and to entirely ignore the companionship and assistance of the heavenly Guide who waits to lead us onward and upward to the shining goal.

And what is the goal or *End* of the race? It is Home, it is Rest, it is Victory.

This, dear, is what I have been learning from the Collect to-day. But I know how far you have outstripped me in this race, and I long to come up to you, that we may together reach

“ The blessed goal,
And He that died in Holy Land
Would reach us out the shining Hand,
And take us as a single soul.”

If I might put my hand in yours, my weakness would be upheld by your strength, for



your feet never seem to stumble or loiter as mine do. If I could always walk by your side, you would inspire me with some of the simplicity, energy, perseverance, and temperance, you display in running the race.

Yet I think I hear a spirit voice which must be yours, asking softly, "Are you forgetting who holds my right hand? Are you putting me between you and the Master, in order to take my hand?"

"No, no," I answer penitently, "may the Master forgive my earthly blindness in overlooking the Hand once pierced for me. If He hold your right hand, He still has one hand free, and I must leave your side to cling to it, that you and I may be upheld and guided by Him alone, and walk independently of each other."

"What! am I wrong again?"

"Yes, for while the Master is using *both* His hands for us, He is taking only one of ours, leaving the other free, and better able, through His assistance, to clasp and help our neighbour."

"Ah, at last I know what you would teach

me, dear—take thou my *other* hand,—and thus the Master unites us to Himself, and to each other. Accept for the lesson the love and thanks of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THE GIFT OF THE BODY.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin ; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit ; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for Christmas-Day.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Nearly nineteen hundred years have passed since the angel of the Lord announced to the shepherds the birth of a Saviour. Yet to-day, with an echo increased by thousands of voices all along the stream of time, the Church gives back the joyous song of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards *men*." For verily Christ took not upon Him the nature of angels, but that

of men; and "Unto *us* a Child is born, unto *us* a Son is given." Yes, to you and to me God has given the "unspeakable gift" of His dear Son. To-day I find within the gift a new "garment of praise."

Once I found in it a "robe of righteousness" to cover all my sin; now I see in it a vesture of humanity, worn by our dear Lord Himself, and given to me to wear for His sake.

On the first Christmas Day, Jesus took upon Him "the likeness of sinful flesh," that *in the flesh* He might condemn sin, and drive out from His Father's *temple of the body* all that could defile it, or detract from its holiness.

And if, as Keble writes, and I believe, even

The base world, now Christ hath died,
Ennobled is, and glorified :

may we not assume that the earthly tabernacle of every immortal spirit is ennobled, purified, and consecrated by our Lord having deigned to inhabit a similar tabernacle of flesh?

We are so tempted to blame our natures,

and complain of our bodies as encumbrances, chaining us to earth, fettering the spirit, and dragging us downward. Yet the body is as truly a precious gift from God, as the soul that inhabits it.

And what is the cause of our rejoicing to-day? Is it not that God gave to His Son a *body*, born of a woman, that Jesus might indeed partake of "our nature?"

Surely then God meant the body of this our nature to be a help, meet for the divine spirit.

If a body had not been prepared for Christ He could not have accomplished the redemption of the world by His death upon the Cross.

And in a *human* as well as spiritual sense, is it not as members of the body of Christ, that we are enabled to "fill up the measure" of His sufferings?

Let us also consider in how many ways the spirit is indebted to the body for various means of expression. Take for instance the *words* of Jesus; were they not in part due to the *tongue*, which spake as never man before spake?

The *looks* of Jesus—were they not seen in His *human eyes*, which, beholding the young man, were lit by love; and looking upon Peter, mingled in one glance infinite pity and human reproach?—and the same eyes wept over the sorrow of death by the grave of Lazarus, — and over the discipline of affliction that awaited Jerusalem. Calm, righteous anger found expression in them, when He grieved over the hardness of men's hearts; and divine compassion made them languid when He sighed over man's infirmity.

What shall we say of the ministering *hands* of Jesus—stretched out to invite, to heal, to save, to help, to bless the world; till in that attitude they were nailed to the Cross? Or of the feet, to which we owe so many of the “blessed steps of His most holy life?”

Can we, ought we, to forget that all this *bodily* ministry of Jesus was in large measure the result of His taking our nature upon Him, and clothing His “reasonable soul” with “human flesh subsisting?”

No; on the contrary, it should help us to

remember that our bodies, like His body, have been built by God to be temples of a Holy Spirit,—incarnations of the Deity in whom we live, and move, and have our being.

These temples have been reared for the worship of God, for the accomplishing of His service, for the ministrations of holy love to our neighbour, and for the consecration of the bread and wine of earthly life.

The Virgin Mary was a woman like unto us, but the temple of her body was so pure that the “strong Son of God” was willing to clothe Himself therein with our nature, our flesh, by means of which lowly garb, every son and daughter of Eve will be able on entering the Father’s house to recognise Him as the Elder Brother.

The human body may be but a frail tenement, and no fairer to look at than the tabernacle in the wilderness covered with unsightly badgers’ skins: time’s defacing finger may have marred it; it may be soiled and stained by the world’s defilement; heart and brain may bear many a token of pillage and ravage,—hands and feet may be seen visibly pierced by sin;—but nevertheless it

is a Christmas gift from God—a gift to be accepted, humbly, reverently, and thankfully, to be kept “In Memoriam” of the Body which God gave to His only-begotten Son on the day when the angelic host first proclaimed, “Christ is born in Bethlehem.”

Oh, let us honour the body as the gift of a pure and heavenly Father, and ask Him to give us grace to preserve it in temperance, soberness, and chastity; that it may be found in His image, a fair, human copy of the Divine Model which He gave to us in the holy Human Body of our Lord Jesus Christ. And will you pray that some such copy may be furnished by—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

MARTYRDOM.

Grant, O Lord, that in all our sufferings here upon earth for the testimony of thy truth, we may steadfastly look up to heaven, and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed ; and, being filled with the Holy Ghost, may learn to love and bless our persecutors by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen, who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus, who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

Collect for St. Stephen's Day.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

This being St. Stephen's Day, I have been picturing to myself the scene of his death, and after looking with changeful emotions of indignation, curiosity, pity, admiration, and reverence, at the different actors in it, I remain riveted by the upward glance of the martyr, who was indeed "faithful unto death."

The eyes, which saw "Jesus standing at

the right hand of God," seem to be reflecting the glory revealed to them. And as I look upon the upturned face so like unto "an angel's," with its divine illumination of joy and peace, I can almost fancy the lips are murmuring—

" O Lord my God, do Thou Thy holy will—
I will lie still—
I will not stir, lest I forsake Thine arm,
And break the charm,
Which lulls me, clinging to My Father's breast,
In perfect rest."

It is the expression of "perfect rest" upon the martyr's countenance which excites a longing in my heart, "that in all sufferings here upon earth," the same steadfast gaze of love and trust may fill my eyes.

We give thanks in Church Sunday after Sunday that we are "hurt by no persecutions," and it is true we are not called upon to endure for Christ's sake the same sufferings as the early Christians. Yet, as Keble truly says, the way to martyrdom does not lie only "through blood and fire;" for "daily strife" and "the writhings of a wounded heart" may effect a longer and more torturing

martyrdom than the stones hurled with such deadly force upon the martyr Stephen. There is the martyrdom of a life taxed to pay in physical pain for the inheritance of a forefather's sin or disease; also the martyrdom of remorse over the just penalty for some broken law.

Desolation has its martyrdom, when the garden of life is robbed of its luxuriance and fruitfulness, and no time remains for a second seed-sowing that shall make the desert rejoice again and "blossom as a rose." There is the exhausting martyrdom of conflict with self,—with the pride, and stubbornness, and rebellion that set themselves in array against man's better nature, and hurl it perpetually against rocks of offence.

Loneliness begets various forms of lingering martyrdom. There is a spiritual isolation, when "a mirror in an answering mind" is sought in vain, and the burthen of spiritual doubt, and weariness, and difficulty must be borne alone. Bereavement brings the sad heart loneliness, which only they who have been knit together by the strongest ties of holy and deathless love, can measure or fully realise.

And there is a loneliness robbed of all sweetness, when the love of a warm, generous heart is not "lifted higher," but slain by a cruel or an indifferent hand; or, if not slain, is wounded for life, and left to writhe alone in its purifying "furnace of living pain."

Faith that is built on man's honour and goodness also suffers a slow martyrdom as it sees Time crumbling away the foundation, and, in place of the once fair edifice, scattered ruins of trust and misplaced confidence.

Ah, yes! the martyrdoms on earth are many, and love, and faith, and hope, and self, have each their own. But happy are they who endure such martyrdom with a steadfast upward gaze, "as seeing Him who is invisible," and who beckons the martyr-host into the glory at God's right hand. In fact, it is only this "looking unto Jesus" which transforms the rod of suffering on earth, into the martyr's palm in heaven. For it is not suffering in itself which constitutes martyrdom, but the willing acceptance of it as *our cross to lift us up from the earth*, till we rise to the Father Himself, even to His breast,

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that we may for ever cling to Him in "perfect rest."

It is not being crucified, but *sharing in Christ's crucifixion*, which wins from our dear Lord the assurance, "Thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." "*Crucified with Christ.*" Are we ready, are we willing to endure the long lingering death of hanging "*each on his cross*" through earth's little while?

" 'O Father! not my will, but Thine be done! '—
So spake the Son.

And everywhere we find our suffering God,
And where He trod
May set our steps: the Cross on Calvary
Uplifted high
Beams on the martyr-host."

I believe, dear, that you will be found in the ranks of the "noble army of martyrs," who count not their lives dear unto themselves. Pray for me, that at your side may be found

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

LIGHT.

Merciful Lord, we beseech thee to cast thy bright beams of light upon thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for St. John the Evangelist's Day.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Since the happy days when you and I first read together "Modern Painters," I have retained the conviction that no artist excels Ruskin in word-painting. I have been studying one of his gems this morning,—one of the most exquisite *literary landscapes* in "Modern Painters," if I may use such an expression. Let me call it a *picture of light*, and put it mentally before you. "There is not a stone, not a leaf, not a cloud, over which light is not felt

to be actually passing and palpitating before our eyes. There is the motion, the actual wave and radiation of the darted beam, . . . the breathing, animated, exulting light, which feels, and rejoices, and acts,—which chooses one thing and rejects another,—which seeks, and finds, and loses again,—leaping from rock to rock, from leaf to leaf, from wave to wave—glowing or flashing or scintillating, according to what it strikes; or, in its holier moods, absorbing and enfolding all things in the deep fulness of its repose, and then again losing itself in bewilderment and doubt and dimness,—or perishing or passing away entangled in drifting mist, or melted into melancholy air, but still, kindling or declining, sparkling or serene, it is the living light, which breathes in its deepest, most entranced rest, which sleeps, but never dies.” Beautiful, is it not?

While gazing on such “animated light” as this, its silence seems broken by the far distant echo of the magnificent fiat which called it into existence. “And God said, Let there be light.”

How sublime was the simple majesty of the command! How unspeakably wonderful was the illumination which, in obedience to it, revealed the void and formless earth! No sound struck the ear as the veil of darkness was rent asunder and disclosed the tremulous loveliness of Aurora. No rolling of chariot wheels or shouting of multitudes heralded the approach of day, as the masses of earth-born clouds swept silently onwards, preparing the way for the swift, noiseless footsteps of the living light.

I stood in speechless ecstasy before this picture, till I saw the brightness fading and darkness again covering the earth,—a darkness more gross and sensible than that which “in the beginning” hid from earth the face of heaven.

Yet once more the voice of God penetrates the darkness, and this time it is the “still, small voice” of a loving Father, saying, “Let there be light.” And a more perfect, more divine obedience responds to the Father’s command, and a *human* voice replies, “I delight to do Thy will. Lo, *I* come!”

Then out of the bosom of God, from the silent depths of a *fathomless will*, the glory of the Lord shone forth, the Morning Star announced the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, and Jesus banished darkness with the words, "*I am the Light* of the world."

Yes, He is indeed the living Light, "which feels, and rejoices, and acts,"—the Light which is the Life of men. "*God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.*"

It is for the bright beams of that Light that we are taught by the Church to pray to-day, when we commemorate the Apostle and Evangelist St. John, who was sent by God to bear witness of the Light of Life.

The term "enlightenment," applied to the doctrine of St. John, is peculiarly appropriate, for all his teaching is as the clear shining of the triple light of knowledge, holiness, and immortality.

We learn from St. John's record of the Lord's own words that our eternal life standeth in the knowledge of God and His Son. "*This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ*" (John xvii. 3). And that we may

increase in the knowledge of God and know in whom we believe, the Evangelist reveals Jesus to us first as "*the Way*," by which we may draw near to God and "enter into the holiest." "No man cometh unto the Father *but by Me*" (John xiv. 6).

Then as "*the Truth*," by which we are freed from sin:—"Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32).

And lastly, as "*the Life*," by which we overcome Death:—"Jesus said, I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die." St. John does more than communicate the knowledge which leads us into "God's marvellous light;"—he also instils the divine precepts in which men must walk if they would "attain to the light of everlasting life." There is no eternal life *out of Christ*, and if we live in Him, we must walk in the light, as He is in the light, that we may be known as the children of light. To walk in the light of the Lord is to be free from the darkness of sin, for "whosoever

committeth sin is the servant of sin," and walketh in the bondage of its darkness and corruption. But the Lord's freemen are they who dwell in the light of God, and have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Among them can be found no man who hateth his brother, or who has fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,—no one who loves the world,—no one who does not love Jesus,—no one who doubts the love of God, or who does not believe on the Lord Jesus,—no one who has not passed from death unto life, or who is not purified by the hope of seeing Jesus.

"If ye *know* these things," said Jesus, "happy are ye if ye *do* them" (John xiii. 17). "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you."

But the night of Death has no terror of darkness for those who have received "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ;" for the death of the body is the dawning of immortality, the true shining of the perfect day. It is the final attainment of walking in the light.

St. John, the beloved disciple, lived to extreme old age in the light of life; and in all his holy doctrine there shines the light of the love enkindled in him when *literally* "leaning on Jesus' bosom."

Over his lonely exile in the isle of Patmos the same illumination shed radiance around him. In his last vision of the servants of God he saw them in the complete enjoyment of the "living light." "The Lord God giveth them light" (Rev. xxii. 5). That is the fulfilment of the promise, "Christ shall give thee light." Isaiah declares the same promise in chapter lx. 19. I will conclude my long letter with his words, for he is to me the *St. John of the Old Testament*, and you will find in his promise not only the echo of St. John's words, but also my wish for you, dear, that within the "city of love and light and song," "the sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory."

That we may together walk and rejoice in that everlasting light, is the prayer of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THE LILY OF INNOCENCE.

O Almighty God, who out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast ordained strength, and madest infants to glorify thee by their deaths ; Mortify and kill all vices in us, and so strengthen us by thy grace, that by the innocency of our lives, and constancy of our faith even unto death, we may glorify thy holy Name ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Innocents' Day.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—


You know how frequently children are spoken of as *flowers*, and it is easy to trace a resemblance between the sweet innocence and unconscious beauty of a little child, and the fragrant loveliness of a rose or lily. To-day's Collect gives me more than an example of innocent childhood, for it also points out how, by the mortifying and killing of all vices as life goes on, the floral similitude may be re-developed. Several writers have drawn attention to the fact,

that though the whiteness of the lily equals that of pure snow, it is nevertheless partly the outcome of foul stagnant water.

By what means the black slimy ooze and the fetid liquid are transmuted into the spotless petals of the lily, He who accomplishes all the metamorphoses of nature alone can tell. And that which has just been said of the lily, applies more or less to all the productions of vegetable life. Nay, more than this; St. Paul uses the same truth as emblematic of man's progress through mortality to immortality.

We know that all seeds must rot before the life-germ can spring into progressive existence, and in its turn put forth leaves, blossom into beauty, and bear fruit and seed. As the decaying leaves of autumn promote the life of spring's new creations, so throughout the whole range of the animal and vegetable worlds mortality must be swallowed to nourish new life.

In the same way there is no quickening of immortality till the death-knell of the body of sin has been struck, and the process of its destruction has commenced.



Out of this very solemn mystery grows a practical consideration calculated to exercise a purifying and renovating influence over the daily life of men and women, who in grief and remorse, long to regain the lost innocence of childhood.

The impure atmosphere of the world is prejudicial to the flowers of youth, and few of even the strongest and fairest blossoms wholly escape the deadly effects of its poisonous exhalations.

Thus it comes to pass in process of time, the lily of youthful innocence, though once watered by the dew of God's Spirit,—beautified by the sunshine of His loving-kindness,—trained, cared for, and protected by His appointed gardeners,—nevertheless betrays the foulness of its origin, and becoming the victim of innate corruption, dies a natural death.

But in the Collect for to-day we read of a death which may follow that of innocence, and from which a still more fragrant and spotless lily may spring into being, and remain unfading to the end of time. There is the death of sin and vice, out of which may arise


the life hidden from the hour of its birth *with Christ in God*, beyond the reach of the world or man's defilements.

One Lily bloomed on earth in the midst of human vileness and corruption, and, plucked by the cruel hands of men, parted uncomplainingly with its sweet life, and in dying revealed an imperishable seed, which, though sown in the dark waters of a sinful world, rises ever and anon above the surface, as a flower worthy to mingle with the asphodels of heaven.

And into the polluted soil of a dead vice a living seed may fall, and bring forth a flower that shall be kept by the hand of Jesus unspotted from the world, till He Himself presents it "*without fault* before the throne of God."

Just as no incorruptible virtue exists on earth, so no vice is beyond the possibility of a death that may set free the hidden germ of a purer and higher life.

Let us therefore, instead of uselessly bewailing the lost innocence of childhood, search diligently for the vices of our maturer age, that they may be mortified and killed.



Let us choose for them no easy death, but expose them to that from which they naturally shrink. Let lusts be starved and self-indulgences tortured,—strip bare self-delusions and hypocrisies, wound vanities, imprison wandering fancies, crucify self-seeking as a thief who would rob God,—and spare neither nails, thorns, nor spear that can hasten the death of our several vices, and set the soul free to begin on earth the immortal life that is to be perfected in heaven. “Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

After praying the Collect appointed for to-day, I would fain add another petition,—that as the Holy Child Jesus alone escaped the massacre of the Innocents, so we may have every darling sin and most cherished object in life sacrificed, rather than risk the danger of not preserving Christ alive in our hearts.

And you, who know my proneness to idolatry, will not fail to earnestly pray that the Lord will not suffer so terrible a vice to live in the heart of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

SPIRITUAL RENEWAL.

Almighty God, who hast given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure Virgin; Grant that we being regenerate, and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the Sunday after Christmas Day.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

The light of this short December day soon faded, but my usual impatience for lamps was curbed by a weariness of spirit, which made me content to do nothing but draw up an arm-chair before the fire, and sit down to think in the flickering light.

When I wrote to you on Christmas Day, I felt well and strong; my body was so little trouble to me, that I rejoiced in it as God's

good gift. Perhaps this had the effect of *upsetting* it (in the Irish sense of the word, viz., setting itself up too high), and this bodily elevation has been followed by spiritual depression.

Now the body is *mine*, but the spirit is *me*; and the moment the spirit becomes subdued by the body, the wildest anarchy takes place among the corporeal possessions. So I found my feet flagging in the path of duty, ears grew dull and eyes dim, the brain became weary and the heart heavy, and another law began to war against that of kindness in my tongue. At last I thought I knew the reason of this physical rebellion of all my members. The journey of life was too great for me to travel alone any farther; I was tired in body and mind, and,—and,—and,—and,—can you not guess?—*I wanted you!!* When you were by my side—

“I loved the weight I had to bear,
Because it needed help of Love.”

The weight and the need only drew you closer to me, and showed me more of your strength and love. But no sooner had the

bells of Advent ushered in the human and spiritual joy of Christmas, than the flesh,—of which I had been feeling almost proud,—suddenly manifested its weakness, and declared that without your help it could no longer endure pain, or loss, or the heart-sickness of hope deferred. Yet, while the fitful firelight cast its shadows on the walls, the better soul then slumbering within me was awakened by one of Longfellow's sweet "Voices of the Night," and some messenger, half-human, half-divine, seemed to stand beside me.

"Tired?" asked a voice, which I thought resembled yours.

"Oh, yes; my little body is aweary of this great world; I cannot walk alone in it. I lose my way, and with it my courage; for the flesh is only weak at best."

"And what of the spirit?—*is the spirit willing?*"

"Willing," I iterated in some confusion, as it flashed across my conscience that my spirit had been rebelling even more than my body against loneliness, sorrow, and pain.

Then I caught the soft murmur of the

words, "Renewed in the spirit of your mind."

A wave of shame passed over me, for the spirit that had moved me all day needed to be exorcised, not renewed. I covered my face with my hands, feeling I was not worthy to be seen by you. Presently out of the silence came another tender breathing.

"Do you know what manner of spirit you are of?"

Alas! yes; and I had been blaming my body throughout the day for all the evil, unthankful, discontented, unchristlike murmurings of my disobedient spirit. I listened for my condemnation, and it seemed to fall on my ear in these words:—"If any man have not *the spirit of Christ*, he is none of His." But by the gentleness with which they were uttered, I measured the depth of the reproach they contained. Conscious-stricken, I had no excuse to offer, but I said pleadingly, "Oh, stay near me, dear friend; only *in your absence* could I have cherished such a wrong spirit all day;" and uncovering my face to stretch forth my hands in entreaty, I thought I saw—not you—but *One* who said, "*Lo, am*

I not always with you?" The vision faded, and then, as if to increase my self-reproach, I recalled the following passage in your last dear letter, which, had I heeded it aright, might have prevented my incurring the Master's just rebuke. "I am afraid we shall miss each other at Christmas-time, but while about our Father's business, it is not wise, or right, or grateful to long over-much for an absent friend, when the Father Himself is with us, and gives such an Elder Brother as Jesus to comfort us during the unavoidable separation, and teach us how to do our duty *cheerfully* as well as *faithfully*. Should we not rather rejoice when He gives us an opportunity of proving that we desire none upon earth *in comparison* with Him who is with us always, even unto the end of the world?"

How could I forget these words of yours?

"Nay,"—I think I hear you answer,—
"how could you remember them, and forget from whom I learned them? Has not my Teacher just been with you, and could any words of mine reach you with the same power as those so lately uttered by His

Holy Spirit? The same Collect which assured you of God's love in giving our nature to His dear Son, also teaches us to pray for the 'daily renewing of His Holy Spirit,' by which alone our human nature can *live unto God* and glorify Him as its Creator."

See, dear, I have been listening to your spirit-voice, and now with a penitent heart I am going to kneel at the Master's feet, that I may hear no voice but His, bidding me sin no more, but learn of Him how to find rest from self and sin. And He will teach me by His Holy Spirit to pray in faith the divinely-taught prayer for flesh and spirit, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and *renew a RIGHT SPIRIT* within me."

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

SPIRITUAL CIRCUMCISION.


Almighty God, who madest thy blessed Son to be circumcised, and obedient to the law for man ; Grant us the true Circumcision of the Spirit ; that, our hearts and all our members being mortified from all worldly and carnal lusts, we may in all things obey thy blessed will ; through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Circumcision of Christ.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Do you not think there is (superficially speaking) a strange contrast between the joyous greetings and festivities of New Year's Day and the reflections suggested by the Church Service for the 1st of January ?

For while the time-honoured wish of "A happy new year" awakens in all who hear it, thoughts of gladness and freedom from sorrow, the Church bids us look on the first blood-shedding of our Lord, and behold His initiation into human pain and suffering.



Yet among the prospects opened out by a new year, perhaps none is brighter than the glimpse of the promised land reserved for all who share in "the true circumcision of the Spirit," which is urged upon those who join in the Church of England services on New Year's Day.

The rite of circumcision was originally instituted as a token of the covenant God made with Abraham, that he should be a father of many nations, to whom God would give the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession.


To the Jew, circumcision was not only the outward sign of membership with the chosen family of God, and the consequent establishing of a claim upon the promises of a Heavenly Father;—it was also a voluntary act of self-renunciation; an acceptance of suffering in obedience to God's will; a pledge of future joy.

The rite thus yields one of many evidences that *loss*, is frequently the forerunner of *gain*, and *sacrifice*, the means whereby the covenant blessings of God are obtained.

The Christian must submit to "the cir-

cumcision made without hands" if he would share the blessings of faithful Abraham, and be made a child of God and a joint-heir of Christ's kingly inheritance. In one sense the circumcision of the Christian is entirely spiritual, yet in another it is applied to the flesh, as well as to the spirit. It is not, however, a single act, as in the case of the Jew, but involves the daily cutting away of all the fleshly excrescences, or unruly members, likely to prevent an *entire consecration of the body* to God. It may even entail the plucking out of the right eye, the cutting off and casting away of the right hand or foot.

But beyond this circumcision or deprivation of the flesh, the Christian is required to circumcise the *spirit*; for it is the spirit that must *will* and *perform* the circumcision of the flesh. The one deals with the outer, the other with the inner life of man; the one is the visible cleansing of the platter, the other is the work of purification, seen only by the eye of God. In the circumcision of the spirit there is a profound probing of the body of sin, a purifying of the hidden springs and motives of life, a voluntary cutting away of



all that could possibly grieve the Holy Spirit of Christ.

We must not look upon our human flesh and bodily frailties as the chief impedimenta in our heavenward journey. The spirit, on account of its own manifold encumbrances, is often a laggard along the road, and not always to be trusted as a guide, or obeyed as a ruler of the body. It has its burthens of doubts and scruples, its slippery tendencies, its grovelling desires, its hours of darkness, and weakness, and self-indulgence. Sometimes less true than the body to its highest instincts, it is unworthy to be considered the superior part of man, yet because of its affinity with the instinct that aspires, we claim for the spirit, a capacity of regeneration beyond any possessed by the body. And each fresh circumcision of the spirit is a renewal of the inward and spiritual grace which produces "a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness." We must daily seek this spiritual circumcision if we desire to free the spirit from all that may clog its aspirations, and to obey in all things the blessed will of Him who caused even His

only-begotten Son—the Child of Promise—to be circumcised in obedience to His law.

I think, if you were near me, dear, you would probably ask me, after listening to all I have found to say on this grave subject of circumcision, “How do you propose to personally obtain a practical result from your belief in what may be termed *Christian circumcision*?” The answer to such a question would very much depend upon the state of my spirit at the time it was asked. Just now, my spiritual circumcision would require the removal of all discontent at not having received a letter from you to-day to wish me “a happy new year,”—also the silencing of all murmuring because a bad cold prevents my going out on this bright frosty day. It would oblige me to sacrifice my inclination to read a new book in order to devote a little time to working for a poor neighbour; and to overcome and banish all the feelings of annoyance excited by various *contretemps* this morning.—

Say, dear, have I apprehended my subject? I think I hear you reply, “Yes, if such spiritual circumcision be the result of a filial,

yearning love, which constrains you not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption ; for “circumcision is that of the *heart*, in the spirit, and not in the letter ; *whose praise is not of men, but of God.*”

Your answer shall not be forgotten by

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THE LEADING OF A STAR.

O God, who by the leading of a star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles; Mercifully grant, that we, which know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious God-head; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the Epiphany.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

This being the feast of the Epiphany, you will not be surprised at my thoughts following the “leading of a star.” I owe many of my cogitations to the starry scene I saw last night.

Before going to bed, I unclosed the shutters in order to see what aspect the outer world was wearing. Snow covered the mountains, and far and near the white robe of the hills spread its soft folds over the earth, which glistening with frost lay sleeping beneath the “spangled heavens.” Within

the "shining frame" I saw the Pleiades, and thought of Mädler's supposition (long since verified), that Alcyone was the actual centre of our galaxy. As I gazed at the scintillations of the lovely star, the light of which, at the rate of eleven millions four hundred thousand (11,400,000) miles a minute, had taken five hundred years to reach the earth, how *grass-like* did man's whole life appear, even when extended to threescore years and ten!


Then the gleaming belt of Orion drew me towards the "far-famed nebula," to peer with eyes dimmed by ignorance at the mysterious mist which is said to be the "primary germ-substance of new worlds,"—worlds that you and I, in some immeasurably distant epoch of eternity, may be allowed to explore.

But the feeblest flight of imagination through the sidereal heavens demands an unclothing of mortality from which present humanity shrinks. For as sin made man desire to cover his body and hide from God, so the spirit, while dwelling in a fleshly tabernacle, fears to travel far along what the

American Indians call "The Road of Souls." It trembles to approach too nearly, regions blazing with systems, constellations, and galaxies which occupy, but do not fill, "illimitable immensity," lest it should be found uncovered in the presence of the transcendental Spirit of Infinitude.

So my spirit, after wandering for a little while among the stars, felt its infirmity, and came back to earth to meditate on the 147th psalm, and read how He who alone can tell the number of the stars, stoops to heal the broken in heart and bind up their wounds.

What a marvellous psalm is the 147th—telling in one verse of God calling all the myriads of seemingly innumerable stars *by their names*,—and in another of His making the young ravens in this small planet His care, and giving to the beast his food; while a third verse contains an assurance for you, and for me, that He taketh pleasure in them that fear Him and hope in His mercy. When I read this assurance my thoughts reverted to you, dear; for through so many of the perplexing paths of life you have been,



as it were, my guiding-star to Him whose "mercy is great above the heavens."

The Collect this morning reminded me of last night's star-gazing, but it set me pondering over the leading of particular stars, and not over scientific investigations of the Milky Way.

Byron calls the stars "the poetry of heaven." If I might take a poet's license with them, I would not sing the woes of "the sorrowing Merope," but seek inspiration in Holy Writ for some less shadowy creations. We read in 1 Cor. xv. 41 that "one star differeth from another star in glory," and brightest of all gleams the Morning Star.

How many wanderers on the ocean or through the wilderness of life, have found their way to safety and rest by the guiding ray of that glorious Star! Coming forth out of Jacob, it shone through the vista of ages till its light pierced the gross darkness of the Gentiles and caused the glory of the Lord to shine upon the heathen who knew not God. It sheds a heavenly light over the mystery of the Cross; and—oh! strange thought—perhaps its full beauty could never

have been seen, but for the darkness which veiled the hour of our Lord's crucifixion. The sun may pour its glorious tide of sunbeams,

“To light up worlds or wake an insect's mirth;”

but darkness must reign before the radiance of a star can be revealed. And it may be that the darkness of sorrow and sin reveals more fully the glory of the Morning Star,

“As darkness shows us worlds of light
We never saw by day.”

In the Book of Revelation we read of a spiritual Pleiades, if I may so call the angels or messengers of the Churches; in Genesis, of a group of eleven stars representing Joseph's brethren, the fathers of a people that should exceed the stars in multitude; in Job, we hear of stars who shared in “the ministry of song” when the sons of God shouted for joy; Jeremiah speaks of stars appointed to give light; and David, of others who were to bear rule.

And clusters of stars in the firmament of heaven may thus become figurative of lesser lights in the sublunary world, all numbered

by God, and known to Him by name as His messengers, light-givers, rulers, sweet singers, or perhaps, like Joseph's brethren, only as members of "the whole family in heaven and earth," beloved for the Saviour-Brother's sake.

Daniel tells us of stars above the heavenly horizons, forming a brilliant galaxy in the train of the Morning Star. "They that be wise," he writes, "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." To be numbered among those stars will be to have after this life, the fruition of our Father's glorious Godhead.

I have not forgotten that you once pointed out to me a star possessing neither beauty nor glory, against which the prophet Amos warns us (v. 26), *the star of a god we make for ourselves*, a "wandering star, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." You told me this when I talked of you as my guiding-star. I am sorry to have used the expression again, after being led by you to *watch alone* for the rising of the Morning Star.—Forgive

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

T A C T.

O Lord, we beseech thee mercifully to receive the prayers of thy people which call upon thee; and grant that they may both perceive and know what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil the same; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*Collect for the first Sunday after the
Epiphany.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Lying beside my open Prayer-Book is the letter in which you say to me, "I have not forgotten your frequent questionings as to the exact meaning of the word *Tact*, or your general dissatisfaction with the dictionary and other authorities on the subject. I think myself that the Collect for the first Sunday after Epiphany affords an excellent definition of the highest kind of tact."

You are right, dear friend; and, like Archimedes, I joyfully cry "Eureka!" though,

instead of running through the streets of Syracuse to announce the fact, I ensconce myself comfortably before my desk to communicate the discovery to you.

I confess that *tact* has always seemed to me an ambiguous, and therefore perplexing word. Sometimes I heard it applied to the skilful diplomacy of worldly wisdom, and then, even if I admired, I certainly did not love it. At other times it described something lovable, but the *something* was of so Protean a nature, that it personated in turn almost every virtue. At every attempt to discover what it really was, I found myself looking through a mental kaleidoscope, in which ever-changing circumstances produced entirely new combinations, all of which I admired, but felt powerless to identify again.

The signification of the word, as given in the dictionary, is as follows:—"Nice perception; ready power of appreciating and doing what is required by circumstances."

But there are people who employ "nice perception" in discovering the weaknesses and foibles of their fellow-creatures, or in judging to a nicety this or that effect in the

working out of very selfish designs. Such people often justly incur a good deal of blame and ill-will; but the tact which I admire so much, never gives offence to any one.

Then, again, "a ready power of appreciating and doing what is required by circumstances," though it *may* rise to heroism, may more easily sink to the low level of the unjust steward's worldly wisdom in making friends of "the mammon of unrighteousness."

But this is not the tact to which I so often attributed many of your acts of kindness, courtesy, and sympathy. And though I could not define tact, of this I felt sure,—that the individual possessing it would never wound people's feelings,—would always try to cover a fault or mistake; set the shy or awkward at ease; invariably see the right thing and do it; never commit solecisms; never step on mental corns or rub people the wrong way; but in deed and in word respect "the give and take of life." I also came to the conclusion that tact, like the poet, must be born, not made, and that,

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being of natural and spontaneous growth, it was useless to think of otherwise obtaining it.

Nevertheless, after finding in the Collect what appears to me an accurate definition of tact, I also find an assumption that the gift lies within the reach of prayer. I first learn that the possession of an eye to perceive, a head to understand, and a hand to do the work before us, constitutes the *something* which takes form as *tact*, and I am able to recognise it at once. Then I see how the perceptive intelligent power which finds expression in tact, is acknowledged to be obtainable through the all-prevailing name of Jesus.

As far as the actual definition is concerned, the Collect and the dictionary are absolutely at one,—nice perception and ready power of doing, being synonymous with perceiving what should be done, and power to fulfil the same. But two words in the Collect have been the revealers to me of the nature of tact.

One is the little word "*ought*," which makes perceiving, and knowing, and doing what is

required, part of the duty we *owe* to God and our neighbour. And as love is the only debt that we are allowed to owe, duty becomes linked with love; and it is certain that no duty can be holy or beautiful that is not prompted by love. Therefore tact seems to me, another name for the swift loving perception of what God would have us to do under all circumstances; though tact is even more than the keen perception of love, and the faithful fulfilment of duty. And this exceeding value of tact, lies in the powerful charm which is added to it by *grace*,—the second of the two words that I have found so helpful in gaining a better understanding of tact.

Grace, is as difficult to define as tact, but it is the sweet spirit of moral, intellectual, and physical beauty,—spontaneous in all its impulses, illimitable in its forms, and incalculable in its results; and it is the quickening power which makes of tact a living soul.

It is grace which gives to tact its Protean character, and it was this same grace, which, embodying itself in almost infinite tact, en-

abled St. Paul to become "all things to all men," that he might save some.

How much I have to thank you, dear, for directing my attention to the Collect, which I shall henceforth regard as your interpretation of tact. It has set me free to "covet earnestly" the gift, and I shall feel that I am asking God for it, when I utter the prayer that I may both perceive and know what things I *ought* to do, and also "may have *grace* and power faithfully to fulfil the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Not till the prayer is granted shall I *deserve* to be

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

PEACE.

Almighty and everlasting God, who dost govern all things in heaven and earth ; mercifully hear the supplications of thy people, and grant us thy peace all the days of our life ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the second Sunday after the Epiphany.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

The Collect to-day has led me “beside the still waters,” and I hardly like to break the quietness by any noise of words. But you ask me to tell you what I think of the Master’s legacy of *Peace*. “Peace I leave with you ; *My peace* I give unto you :” that is the form of the bequest.

I can try to tell you what an invaluable possession the legacy is to the Christian who has obtained it, and who uses it aright, and what a precious earnest it is of the untold wealth from which the legacy is

drawn—" *the peace of God*, which passeth all understanding."

But it would be difficult, if not impossible, to measure the fulness of the blessing of peace. Each time I softly whisper the word to myself, the waters of quietness seem to bathe my soul afresh.

Peace—the "great calm" after the fury of the storm.

Peace—the benediction after prayer.

Peace—the divine hush of being *still* as well as "*safe* in the arms of Jesus."

Peace—the perfection of *rest in the will of God*.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth on Thee."

"Wherein, O Lord, doth peace consist? In giving thyself up with all thy heart to the divine will, not seeking thine own interest, either in great matters or in small, either in time or in eternity. In *justifying God* in whatsoever He appoints, and in not ceasing to praise His holy name;" asks and replies Thomas à Kempis. Dante also expresses the same consciousness of the

source of peace when, speaking of God, he says, "*His will* is our peace." Whether Dante's words may be understood as meaning that God wills our peace, or that our peace lies in doing the will of God, it remains indisputable that man's peace is bound up in God's will. And the Collect for to-day expresses the same truth, making our peace to rest upon the belief that *God governs all things in heaven and earth*. These "all things" belong to the past, the present, or the future. But in the past our brightest hopes faded; the promises to which we clung were left unfulfilled; sins remained unconquered, duties were neglected, grievous errors and mistakes were made. Is there any peace to be found amid these haunting spectres of the past? Do they not, on the contrary, trouble the present and fill it with disquietude? But the past is in God's keeping, and can never be touched again without His permission. We must leave it in His hands, knowing that it was governed by Him. For the sins He gave us a Saviour, for the sorrows He provided comfort, for the trials there was a "need be." As entirely

as we must trust the present and the future to the sweet will of God, so we must leave the irretrievable and irreparable past, in the keeping of God's mercy and love.

And where shall we look for the peace of to-day? To the same truth, namely, "The Lord reigneth." If we believe that all things are under His rule and governance, we know that not a sparrow to-day, nor an insect a hundred years hence, can fail to accomplish His will. And are we not much better than the sparrows? shall we be less compassionately and righteously governed than they are?

To-day we pray, "Grant us *Thy* peace," and the answer to the petition is swift and sure from the lips of Jesus:—"My peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

Can we listen to these words and not join heartily in the hymn of faith—

"His love in time past forbids me to think
He will leave me at last in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms *His good pleasure* to help me *quite*
through!"

We must also remember that the *present hour* is all that God vouchsafes at a time, for the enjoyment of peace ;—peace of conscience over a forgiven and God-governed past,—peace of heart over the God-governed trial, temptation, or weakness of to-day,—peace of mind over an unknowable to-morrow, that as surely as yesterday and to-day rests in the hands of the King who governs all things.

We are weak, we are sinful, we are often heavy-laden ; but if in all that occurs to us we can say, “ It is Thy will, My Father, and I have no other,” then His will becomes our peace. In the keeping of God’s commandments there is great reward, but it is in *loving His law* that we find great peace. For the secret of peace is to lay down our own wills and cease from self. Then, and not before, shall we—

“ Feel at heart that One above,
In perfect wisdom, perfect love,
Is working for the best.”

It is only by leaving *all* things, past, present, and future, to the will of Him who governs them in heaven and earth that we can—

“Taste before Him, lying still,
E’en in affliction, peace.”

Peace is love reposing,—leaning on the bosom of Jesus to realise His words, “*In Me ye shall have peace.*” Justified by faith, we have *peace with God*; sanctified wholly, we have the *peace of God*.

But no words that I have now been able to write concerning our dear Lord’s legacy of peace, can express its wealth of perfection as Bickersteth does in his exquisite lines :—

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin :
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.
Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed ;
To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.
Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging round ;
On Jesus’ bosom nought but calm is found.
Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away ;
In Jesus’ keeping we are safe and they.
Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown ;
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.
Peace, perfect peace, Death shadowing us and ours ;
Jesus has vanquished Death and all its powers.
It is enough : earth’s struggles soon shall cease,
And Jesus call us to heaven’s perfect peace.”

Adieu, dear friend ! May “the God of love
and peace be with you,” and with

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

INFIRMITIES.

Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon our infirmities, and in all our dangers and necessities stretch forth thy right hand to help and defend us ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the third Sunday after the Epiphany.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I have grown sad pondering over the two words, "Our infirmities." An infirmity is not a sin, but a flaw, a weakness, and often excites more compassion than condemnation.

Nevertheless, it is to me, like

"The little rift within the lute,
That by and by will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all."

But my sadness springs less from the pitiable sight of the *rift itself*, than from a perception of the beauty that is marred, and the value that becomes deteriorated by it. The perfection of a musical instrument

arises principally from its *responsiveness* to the Musician's own feeling. It must be like another heart vibrating in unison with his own, capable of reflecting his moods, and of meeting all the demands made upon its wealth of expression. The jarring of a false note, a dissonant string, would snap asunder any previously existing sympathy between the two; and the more perfect the instrument, the keener would be the regret over any irremediable flaw in it.

The failure of an endeavour to make the note ring true again, would create a sorrow that could only be measured by the heart left to choose between silence and discordance.

The effect of an infirmity upon a good man or woman, is very much the same as that produced on a fine instrument by a defective note. It mars the perfection of a character, and spoils the music of what might otherwise be an harmonious life. God has made man a noble instrument; but alas! a single infirmity is often enough to jangle it out of tune. The Epistle for to-day enumerates some of the spiritual infirmities which beset mankind. Without stopping to dwell

on the dangers to which they may severally lead, we can catch a glimpse through the list in the Epistle, of many a rift in God's living instruments, which hinders them from fully responding to His divine touch, and prevents their being always attuned to sound forth His praise and glory.

The first sentence in the Epistle runs thus : "Be not wise in your own conceits." Consider the effect of conceit upon a talented man. How it tarnishes the brilliance of intellectual or physical gifts ! Does it not remind one of the "dead flies" deprecated by Solomon in Eccles. x. 1 ? For conceit may be the "little folly" insidiously destructive to a man's reputation for wisdom and honour.

"Recompense to no man evil for evil." Here we may see how the mean little rift of "tit for tat" silences for ever all possibility of real magnanimity

"Provide things honest in the sight of all men." We pass by the actual thief, the fraudulent and habitually dishonest man, to glance at such as are endowed by nature with truthfulness, and are yet led by amiable weakness to countenance, and sometimes practise, the little

shams of social life. The more truthful the nature, the greater appears the flaw of the slightest deviation from honesty in word or deed ; and nothing can hide a frank, open nature from its own proper scorn, when it has weakly followed the leading of a false note into the discord of insincerity.

“ If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Yet how many a great man has dimmed his fame by the comparatively tiny defect of irritability, which, widening out into bitter sarcasm against his fellow-men, has made a gulf between him and *true greatness*. Infirmities may be but little rifts at first, but, like “ the little foxes which spoil the vines,” they may—I had almost written they *must*—grow larger in time.

In the Gospel for to-day we read of *bodily* infirmities, and they, though perhaps less dangerous than those which weaken the spirit, show the necessity for a right hand to be stretched out to help the body, as well as to defend the spirit. And the compassion which the centurion is recorded to have shown towards the infirmity of his servant

is like the stretching forth of a human hand in sympathy, to lead a weak brother within reach of the strength that is always so ready and willing to be "*touched with the feeling of our infirmities.*"

I went in search of some such sympathy a little while ago. The *silence* of the life I lead, now you are gone, was oppressing me, and I yearned for some response to my cry for some one to share a bright gleam of joy which unexpectedly shone across my lonely path. In this mood I caught sight of a lute which I once thought approached perfection more nearly, than any other instrument left within my reach. Every string seemed to give back an harmonious echo to my voice. Many a strain of Kingsley's "grand sweet song" of life and death, had been wafted from it in melodious undulations, to mingle with "the vast forever" of all that is immortally beautiful and true. In listening to the sweet responsive melodies I drew from it, I forgot that I had any share in their creation, and *mistook an echo for a living voice.* Like the carpenter who made from the residue of a tree, a god that could neither

deliver nor convince him that he held a lie in his right hand, I breathed upon the mute thing my own breath of life, and then imagined that it lived, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. But within the lute, which, after glorifying with humanity, I at length regarded as almost too divine to be *merely human*, there came a little rift, and a painful wonder filled my ears when every now and then my touch fell on a discordant note. I feared the fault might be my own, and strove to bring the note into unison again. Failing in that, I sought to touch the strings more carefully, that I might avoid the discord. Still ever and anon it jarred upon me, and I began to shrink from touching it at all. But I still loved it, and its former pure, sweet tones often haunted my memory, and aroused in me a passionate longing to hear them once again. Yet each fresh attempt to awaken them only served to show me I was seeking an impossibility, and my hands, wearied with vain efforts, lost their tender and caressing touch, till in an anger which sprang from pain, I sometimes struck the lute sharply, and perhaps unkindly. Alter-

nately saddened and angered by it, I wished at last that I could bury it out of my sight like a dead thing, that I might at least plant flowers over its grave, and so hide it under some new form of beauty. Unable to do this, I covered it up and left it in silence, till the joy of which I told you just now, sent me forth in quest of sympathy, and catching sight of the old beloved instrument, my foolish loving hands, that had so long been clasped in quiet resignation, thrilled once more with a sudden tremulous hopefulness that at least one note might still be found to ring out true and sweet in unison with my gladness. So I touched it impetuously, but shrank back appalled at the sound it gave forth. As if resenting the disturbance, a harsh voice asked me roughly, "Well, what is the matter with *you*?" "Nothing is the matter with *me*," I answered impulsively, stung by the unsympathetic heartlessness of the question. For the speaker knew well how much distress my tuneless and broken lute had caused me. I was wrong to answer "nothing;" for much was the matter. The little rift within the lute, born of a natural infirmity, had slowly

widened, till not a string, not a note, was left to vibrate in harmony with either my heart or voice. And I wept, that even the oppressiveness of silence should be preferable to the only sound that could now be emitted by my once beautiful lute.

And I wept still more bitterly when I found in my lute the image of a broken friendship, the semblance of a once beautiful character hopelessly disfigured, if not destroyed, by an infirmity, and the sweet bond of sympathy cruelly set aside by such heartless indifference as found expression in the unfeeling question, "Well, what is the matter with you?" But while I was weeping, another voice—and oh! how different were its tones!—softly asked *the same question*. There was something so encouraging and soothing in the "Well!" that I had no hesitation in pouring out my sorrow over the infirmities which snap some of the holiest ties of affection, turn strength into weakness, beauty to ashes, and joy to grief. "Surely," said I in sinful despair, "surely God has forgotten to be gracious. He has shut up His tender mercies, or He would not suffer His living

instruments to get so hopelessly out of tune that reparation becomes impossible."

For all reply I heard again the question, "What is the matter with *you*?" So intense was the sympathy which found expression in the words, that I knew the voice must be yours, or the Master's. It went to my heart with the loving correction I needed, and my conscience replied at once, "Forgive me, dear Lord. The matter is *my own infirmity*, which led me to persist so long, in trying to delight myself with an imperfect instrument, that could not be attuned to Thy praise, and in wasting so much of Thy precious gift of time, in seeking to find a heart in a thing all clay, whilst Thou wert patiently, lovingly knocking at the door of my heart for entrance."

Oh, sweet voice! that in ending my quest for sympathy has by the power of love turned a cruel, heartless question into the kindly admonition which has led me to a searching of heart for my own infirmity!

So faithful and so tender are the messages, dear friend, which you often give me from the Master, that the voice I heard might

well be yours ; yet I think the question was *last* uttered by the voice of Jesus. He alone can take upon Himself "our infirmities," and, with the intuition of a Brother's love, He knows the need that women have to guard against the infirmity of a loving heart, likely to be tempted to set its affections on things of earth, instead of on things above all danger of little rifts, that may put to silence the music of love.

Ask Him, dear, that against the infirmity of an overweening affection for any earthly object, His right hand may be outstretched to help and defend

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

TEMPTATION.

O God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright ; Grant to us such strength and protection, as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the fourth Sunday after the Epiphany.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Every man may be said to make his own vocabulary, and only thus can we account for the large number of different significations attached to a single word. It is interesting to observe how a word becomes modified to suit the individuality of the person using it, and also how, after a series of verbal transmigrations, the original meaning of a word may reach its Nirvana, and become lost to the world. Then, again, there are words so extensive in their signification that many

minds must needs set out in different directions, and each bring home a part, if the whole meaning is to be collected. But curiously enough, some far-reaching words receive a very limited definition, and are universally understood only in their narrowest sense. Such a word is *Temptation*, which conveys to most people only the idea of an awesome, terrible thing, loathed and dreaded by all who know its power. It conjures up visions of evil, disguised under seductive forms; it points to the Devil and his emissaries, busily decoying thousands of victims along the broad road that leadeth to destruction.

And judging that temptation was but a hideous evil, I used to wonder that Jesus should bid us ask our Father not to lead us into it. For we are taught that he who leads another into temptation, sins more grievously than he who falls under the power of the tempter; therefore it was impossible to believe that God could tempt or lead us into evil. But some one told me long ago that the word "*lead*" (or, as it is in the Revised Version, "*bring*") would be more correctly

rendered "*leave*." I am not scholar enough to be able to vouch for the accuracy of this rendering, which is not given in any language with which I am familiar, but it gave me a totally different view of temptation, and showed me how the man who endureth it, may indeed be considered "blessed."

The word "temptation" is derived from *tendere*, to stretch; and unwinding itself from this derivation, I behold the roll of life's temptations traced as a part of the mysterious way in which God moves to perform His wonders.

The little child, even before he can speak, stretches out his hands that he may obtain something which promises to give him pleasure. And from infancy to old age life is a long temptation, a reaching after things not yet attained, which offer some "dear delight."

Is it not for happiness that man is ever stretching forth his hands? And I conceive that the blessing of temptation lies in this—that ere we can stretch far enough to lay hold of true and lasting happiness, our temptation must have led us so near, so very

near to God, that from His own hand we are able to receive the "crown of life," the diadem of an immortal joy.

This stretching out of our hands after happiness, is the following of a lead into temptation, but believing that the way to escape all risk of danger lies *before*, and *not behind* us, we breathe the prayer that we may not be *left in* temptation, but *carried through* it straight upward to the door of our Father's house. The shadow of danger, and also perhaps of death, lies over every valley of temptation; for we may grow weary in well-doing, and seek to enjoy the slothfulness of sin, instead of continuing to stretch every nerve to scale "the toppling crags of Duty," and *through* temptation reach


"The shining tablelands
To which our God Himself is sun and moon."

God will doubtless lead every one of His children into temptation. We know that His Holy Spirit led Jesus into it; but He passed *through it*, that we might be able to follow in His footsteps along the same path,—beyond the sensual gratification of the flesh,—beyond

all the alluring happiness of the world,—beyond all the unholy seductions of the devil, right onward even to the steps of the throne of God.

The temptation into which God leads us is the trial of our faith, and that is precious in His sight, for there is no sin in such temptation. Our Lord, though tempted in all points like ourselves, was without sin. It is only when we curl ourselves up in self-indulgence and remain *unstretched* towards God through temptation, that we fall into sin and run the risk of finding ourselves left in the midst of *consuming*, instead of *cleansing* fires.

God tempts us towards Himself by an everlasting love, an eternal joy, an infinite peace. Say, dear, shall we come short of it because we cannot endure the temptation through which we must pass in order to be fitted to claim His offered gifts? Oh, rather let us courageously bear the strain, the hardness of our trial! God will not *leave us in temptation*, or suffer us to be tempted above that we are able. He knows that we are set in the midst of many and great



DAUGHTERS AND MEN BY REASON OF THE frailty of
OUR NATURE WE CAN NOT ALWAYS stand upright.
AND THEN HE MAY GRANT TO US SUCH strength
AND PROTECTION AS MAY support us in all
DANGERS, AND carry us through all tempta-
tions. IS THE heartiest prayer of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

LEANING HARD.

O Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion ; that *they who do lean* only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for the fifth Sunday after the Epiphany.

“ Leaning on Thee with childlike faith,
To Thee the future I confide ;
Each step of life’s untrodden path
Thy love shall guide.”

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

The 107th Psalm begins with an exhortation to the redeemed to give thanks to God for His enduring mercy and goodness ; and countless is the multitude gathered out of the lands, east, west, north, and south, to swell that mighty pæan of thanksgiving and victory.

Yet not one soul amid the ransomed throng from which that glad chorus arises has reached—

“Those halls of Sion, all jubilant will sing,” without first treading “a solitary way” through the wilderness of life. And the walking therein was so toilsome and lonely, that many of the poor wanderers were often fain to lie down and die before they reached the end. Then had they no heart to sing the songs of Sion. “Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.” But when they had passed the Border Land and crossed the river that bounded the wilderness, the joyful cry burst forth that God had “led them forth by a *right* way.” There was a time when I set forth on *my* solitary way, without any sense of loneliness. On the right hand and on the left, new wonders, new beauties, and joys attracted my attention, and, full of youth and hope, I went on my way rejoicing, till clouds began to gather and difficulties arose, and then I felt the need of a guiding and sustaining hand. The need was not left unsupplied, for one day, when “much discouraged because of the way,” I met *you*, and you said, “Lean on me.” From that time I began to learn how strength could be perfected in weakness, and it was sweet to

be weak when you were so strong, and all your strength was mine to lean upon. I thought that henceforth it would not matter to me whether the road were rough or long ; for it had ceased to be solitary, and nothing impeded my progress.

Oh, how wisely you guided me ; how tenderly you cared for me ; how watchfully you guarded me ! Once, when I feared I might be tiring you, I tried to be a little less dependent ; and you were grieved, and told me I was not *leaning hard enough* for you to feel my love. Then I would have willingly grown weaker in order to prove how *entirely* I leaned upon your love ; and as the happy years flew by, I heeded not that all my strength and courage lay sleeping, till you were suddenly wanted elsewhere and the hour of awakening came. While bewildered and distressed at the prospect of continuing my journey alone, a burthen such as I had never felt when you were with me, was laid upon me. Hungering and thirsting for aid, my soul fainted within me ; I crept along with difficulty, bowed down beneath my painful load, till I heard a Voice

ask, "Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?" (Cant. viii. 5).

I answered sadly, "It is not I, for my beloved is gone, and no one is left for me to lean upon."

Again the Voice—

"Child, lean thy head upon My breast ;
It was My love that spread thy rugged path."

But I said, "Can *Love* be thus unkind, to spread a path so rough that it must wound my feet and cause my frequent fall?"

The Voice made no reply, but from your far-off home *you* seemed to ask me, "Was the way less rough for me when I led you by it?" Alas! I knew how often your feet had bled along the path, and though my weight was added to the heavy load you carried, no murmur ever escaped you. Unflinching you still walked on, cheering me with smiles and words of love, and ever keeping your "heart at leisure from itself," ready to give help to any burthen-bearer that we met. Ashamed of my faint-heartedness, I kept silence for a little while; till

again the peevish moan broke forth, "It is so dark, and each step entangles me in briars and thorns. I get no nearer to the end of my journey; I shall perish on my solitary way."

Through the darkness came the answer—

"Break through the brambles and briers that obstruct thee ;

Dread not the gloom and the blackness of night ;

Lean on the Hand that will safely conduct thee ;

Trust to His eye to whom darkness is light."

Tremblingly I held out my hand, but neither trust nor love was in the movement ; it was only the involuntary response of weariness and fear. Nevertheless my hand was taken, and along the slippery path I was held up, and now and then lifted out of, or over the mire. I often felt grateful to the Hand that led me on so safely, but I never sought to touch it lovingly, and it awoke in me no sense of companionship. I was *safe*, but still *lonely* and sad.

At last I heard the words, "Child of my love, I do not feel the pressure of thy care."

My heart leapt at the words, they were so like those which had once fallen from your

lips,—“You are not *leaning hard enough*.” Still I hesitated to trust myself entirely to my unknown guide, and I said wearily, “No one can feel or know the weight of the oppressive burthen I am carrying.”

The Voice replied—

“I know thy burden, child. I shaped it,
Poised it in My own Hand, made no proportion
In its weight to thine unaided strength :
Before I gave it thee, I said,
I shall be ever near, and *while she leans on Me*,
This burden shall be Mine, not hers.
So shall I keep My child within the circling arms
Of Mine own love.”

“This burden shall be Mine, not hers,” I repeated to myself; and then I said aloud, “But I have borne it long alone; the burthen has been mine, and I am fainting even now beneath its weight.”

“And yet you will not lean on Me,” replied the Voice. “Come closer; let me feel My child reposing on My heart.”

Then I drew near, or rather I should say by loving-kindness I was drawn within the sheltering arms that have ever since enfolded me. In the darkest and dreariest part of

the wilderness I found "Him whom my soul loveth;" and He will never leave me. *He will go with me all the way.* His encircling arms of love will carry me even across the dark river of death that lies between me and *Home*.

"Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness leaning on her Beloved?" It is I, dear friend; and now you will rejoice to see I am no longer alone, and though—

"I journey through a desert drear and wild,
Yet is my heart by such sweet thoughts beguiled,
Of *Him on whom I lean*—my strength and stay—
I can forget the sorrows of the way."

Had I not missed you so much, dear friend, my burden would have been less heavy; but had it been lighter, I should have sought no help when yours was unavailable. Nothing but the loss of such sweet human aid as you gave me, could have shown me my need of the "Friend above all others,"—nor could I have known how to love Him as I do, had I not known what it was, what it is, to love you. It is only when leaning on Him that I can do without you. Clinging to Him, He

feels every throb of my heart, and sometimes
He asks—

“Thou lovest Me?—I doubt it not.
Then loving Me—*Lean hard.*”

Adieu, dear friend, upon whose strength
I first learned *how to lean*. Bereft of thee,
upon the Master's “everlasting arms” now
leans—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

PURIFICATION THROUGH HOPE.

O God, whose blessed Son was manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil, and make us the sons of God, and heirs of eternal life ; Grant us, we beseech Thee, that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves, even as he is pure ; that, when he shall appear again with power and great glory, we may be made like unto him in his eternal and glorious kingdom ; where with thee, O Father, and Thee, O Holy Ghost, he liveth and reigneth, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Collect for the sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

I am among the people who consider that “happiness is a great beautifier.” I also think that *Hope* may be a great purifier.

But in order for hope to purify, the substance of the thing hoped for must be pure and wholesome, and not of a perishable nature.

Some such hoped-for things are put

before us in to-day's Collect,—membership with Christ, sonship by adoption, heirship through grace. It is the *first* which destroys the works of the Devil, by rescuing from among the children of wrath, those willing to become members of the family of God.

The *second* gives to each member his place in the household of God ; and the *third* is the attestation of the adoption.

Sonship is the result of membership, and joint-heirship with Christ must follow sonship.

The body of Christ is presented to us in the Bible under many different forms, from which I select two, as furnishing substances of faith in “things hoped for” likely to exercise a purifying influence over man. First, as a temple. The body of Christ is “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Its living stones, like those in the Temple of Solomon, are made ready by much hewing and chiselling on earth before they are fitted into their niches, so that no sound of “hammer nor axe, nor any tool of iron,” may be heard in the heavenly house while it is in building. To

be a stone chosen by the Divine Architect who planned the building, and regarded with His approval, ought to be the highest ambition of every Christian man and woman.

Many roughly-hewn stones will find a place in the vast fabric, and even coarse flints and tiny pebbles may be turned to account by the Master, who chooses the stones according to His own design, appoints their place and use, and also the workmen and tools to prepare them for service. But the corner-stones, the keystones, the lofty pillars, the sculptured capitals, must long endure the hammer and chisel, for it is the cutting and polishing that makes one stone to differ from another, and accomplishes the perfection of each. Therefore every stroke of the hammer, every fragmentary loss, all long infliction of the graving tool, all sharp, decisive blows, should be not only welcomed, but accepted with thanksgiving, as tokens that the Master Builder has a *purpose of beauty* concerning us.

While the work of building is in progression, disorder and confusion are relegated to the world's workroom, but the Master walks throughout its length and breadth, encourag-

ing and directing the work and the workers, and one by one the stones are carried away to be placed in the building that is growing up so silently, "eternal in the heavens." And every stone, whether hidden or conspicuous, is built into the temple by the hand of the Master alone.

The hope of finding a place of everlasting rest within that temple, of being a "*polished stone*" when the Master calls for it, of beholding the whole building filled with the glory of the Lord, of hearing from its walls the triumphant echo of the angels' song, must, if constantly cherished, purify the daily life of every member of Christ, child of God, and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven.

The body of Christ is also that of a perfect *man*. A man kingly and noble, omniscient, omnipotent, divinely human in His sympathies, *perfect in the perfection of all His members*, holy, harmless, undefiled. In continuance those members are being fashioned, "till we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Can we

believe this, and not long to be pure even as He is pure? Can we think that so glorious a Head will crown members still spotted by the world, and uncleansed from sin? No eye on earth has seen the radiant beauty of His countenance; no hand still uplifted here below, has been clasped by Him in welcome on entering the Father's home; no mortal tongue has yet been able to describe how "altogether lovely" Jesus is.

But these are the words of St. John to the children of God:—"Beloved, now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope purifieth himself even as He is pure."

"This hope!" What is it? It is twofold—to see Jesus and to be like Him. After a lovely life on earth is ended, and the darkness of death has closed all the sweet memories of its beautiful sunset, nothing can soften the pang of remembering the last "Good-bye" but the hope that we shall see our dead again, when the seal of death has

melted from the eyes of our beloved. Only the fruition of such a hope can end the night of weeping with a morning of joy. For then we too shall see, with eyes that have also pierced the mystery of death, undimmed by tears, undazzled by earth's glare, unblinded by infirmity. Can we, however, bear that *now* our dear dead should look us through and through and see us as we are, unless we daily purify ourselves with the hope of beholding them *as they are*? For as Jesus is, *so are they*, because, as members of Christ, as sons and daughters of God, they are made like unto Him. "We shall be *like Him*, FOR we shall *see Him as He is*."

"*Like Him*." Holy and faithful, spotless in purity, infinite in love, "beyond all brightness beautiful." "Like Him!" Ah! dear friend, once my highest hope was to be like you, and that hope made me desire to be loving, gentle, pure, and true, as you are on earth. But now my hope has mounted far higher, and aspires to be like you in heaven, when you shall be "like Him." So at His feet, low at His feet, I kneel and whisper—

" Lord, I confess to Thee sadly my sin,
 All I am tell I Thee, all I have been.
 Purge Thou my sin away, wash Thou my soul
 this day.

Lord, make me pure.

" Ah, mine iniquity crimson hath been,
 Infinite, infinite, sin upon sin ;
 Sin of not loving Thee, sin of not trusting Thee.
 Infinite sin.

Yet not despairingly come I to Thee ;
 No, nor distrustingly bend I the knee.
 Sin hath gone over me, yet all my hope shall be
To be like Thee.

Like Jesus ! Oh, what faith do I need, to
 be able to believe that this will ever be said of
 one so erring and sinful as—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THE UNFADING MEMORIAL.

Almighty God, who didst give such grace unto thy holy Apostle St. Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed him without delay ; Grant unto us all, that we, being called by thy Holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil thy holy commandments ; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect for St. Andrew's Day, November 30.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

Did you ever notice the connection between the first festival in the Christian year and the Lessons of Advent Sunday ? Perhaps I am wrong to use the word *connection*, for the latter breathe only divine communion and aspiration, while St. Andrew's teaching has a special bearing upon human fellowship. Nevertheless the two aspects of truth are presented so closely together by our Church, that to me they

seem linked with each other. The holy teaching of Advent convicted me of a tendency towards idolatry, by contrasting my ever-present longing for an absent earthly friend with my half-forgotten desire for the return and the presence of Jesus. And I saw that thoughts of our Lord's Advent should lift us higher than all human loves and friendships, and make us long to "behold the King in His beauty," and desire nothing, no one, upon earth in comparison with Him. But to-day I have been reading Keble's lines on St. Andrew's Day, and I see as clearly, how closely love to our neighbour is intended to follow upon our love to God. Indeed, I think the Church knits them in holy matrimony when she places Advent Sunday and St. Andrew's Day side by side.

Keble, with his filial and attentive ear, has not only listened to the Church's voice, but has passed on to us the sweet words he has heard. I need not quote the poem,—it is so well known as one of the finest conceptions of brotherly love.

When I recall our walks and rides amid

some of earth's loveliest scenery, our studies over the marvels of nature, our enjoyment of art, our intellectual companionship with highly-gifted men and women of all nations and periods, through the medium of literature, our sympathetic appreciation of all exquisite sights, sounds, and sensations,—I feel how richly stored the

“Dear remembrance of bright hours together told”

may become. Then follows so naturally the wish expressed by Keble for “a surer pledge”—a seal of love to last eternally.

He suggests that this should be sought, not in the dear remembrance of personal happiness; not even in the joy of reclaiming the erring, or in emulating a noble example; but in such “wreaths of hope” as afford an unfading memorial.

Wreaths of the hope that has been born of God, and has lived on, not only in happy times of encouragement and blessing, but through sorrow, and sin, and loss, and disappointment, and failure. Immortal hope, which is as a crown of beauty, whether worn on a childish brow or on the snowy locks of

age. But to weave such a wreath is the work of a whole lifetime,—earnest hearty work for the Master's sake. To weave it needs *faith*, of which the work shall be a living evidence; and *love* is needed to beautify it, and every leaf must be bound up in the hope of endless life and happy service.

We have often heard of St. Andrew's *Cross*. To-day I have caught a glimpse of his *Wreath*. It is not of thorns; that "sharp regalia," as Mrs. Browning calls it, was for our dear Lord alone. It seems rather to be made of "the things he had lived for," after the pattern of "The Everlasting Memorial," so beautifully described by Dr. H. Bonar. Would that I could weave such a wreath, fair enough for your dear brows to wear when I am gone! Alas! I fear my life will be but a "fading frail memorial" to leave behind in the world, unless I follow more closely the ready obedience of St. Andrew in taking up his daily cross. Every leaf in the wreath of hope should be gathered from some living root. I should want to weave in mine the olive-leaf of peace, to keep my heart from being so anxious and troubled about many things,

when only one is needful ; next an aspen leaf, that would not tremble when its life became identified with a cross ; then a rose of love, which should have budded from the "Rose of Sharon ;" and a lily of purity, kept unspotted from the world's mire by the sheltering leaves of the "Lily of the Valley."

And where shall I find the hope to make such a wreath immortal, if I could weave and you could wear it ? Will it be at the "endless feast," where we shall sit "enjoying each the other's good ?" Nay, the "wreaths of hope" may be worn there, but they must first be sought in the way St. Andrew found "his own brother Simon," namely, by readily obeying the calling of Jesus, and in praying for grace to give ourselves up obediently to follow His holy commandments. Then, and then only, are human hearts prepared and set free to love each other with a deathless love, and, while following Jesus, weave for each other—

" Wreaths of hope for aye to live,
And thoughts of good together done,

That so, before the judgment-seat,
Though changed and glorified each face,
Not unremembered they may meet,
For endless ages to embrace."

If there should be any such unfading
memorial of me in your "wreath of hope,"
how great will be the joy of

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

DOUBT.

Almighty and everliving God, who for the more confirmation of the faith didst suffer thy holy Apostle Thomas to be doubtful in thy Son's resurrection ; Grant us so perfectly, and without all doubt, to believe in thy Son Jesus Christ, that our faith in thy sight may never be reproved. Hear us, O Lord, through the same Jesus Christ, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for evermore.

St. Thomas the Apostle, December 21.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

There is perhaps no heavier burthen than that of *Doubt*, whether concerning God, our neighbour, or ourselves.

In the affairs of this life it makes our daily walking a sort of fearful exercise, accompanied by many a slip and frequent fall.

It begets a feeling of suspense which destroys tranquillity, and gives rise to a state of *indecision* which enfeebles action.

Doubt is pernicious to body and soul ; for it banishes peace, and without peace man is tossed to and fro on troublesome waves.

Our dear Lord, after teaching His disciples to pray to their Father in heaven, added the warning, " Neither be ye of doubtful mind." The prayer He had just taught them was intended to remove doubt and anxiety ; for if prayed aright it must bring the faith and trust of a little child into the heart, and put an end to living in any sort of " careful suspense " (marg.)

It has been said that " Doubt is devil-born ;" and the foregoing reflections might lead one to accept the statement without any hesitation. But the poet who thus suggests that the Devil is the origin of Doubt, also expresses a belief that

" There lives more faith in *honest* doubt
 than in half the creeds ;"

and there is a kind of agreement between such a belief and the leading idea in the Collect for to-day.

When doubt is but another name for disloyalty, Tennyson may well ascribe it to the

Devil; but when the possibility of *faith* and *honesty* existing in doubt is admitted, one must cease to consider *all* doubt as "Devil-born," unless we also embrace Longfellow's suggestion that the Devil himself is

"God's minister,
Who labours for some good
By us not understood."


For the Church's voice in the Collect to-day distinctly teaches that God intended the doubt which St. Thomas felt and expressed, to work only good, inasmuch as it was suffered for "the more confirmation of the faith."

Now the mystery of all pain and evil lies in the thought that they are co-existent with the love and omnipotence of God. Yet to connect evil in any way with God is (at first sight) like declaring that Christ hath concord with Belial. Nevertheless, if out of what appears to us wholly *evil* we can trace the hand of God evolving *good*, may it not be well to pause and consider whether, in our blindness, we may not have mistaken good for evil, owing to our inability to "look before and after," as God can?

I may be wrong, but it seems to me that

if in any sin, suffering, or sorrow we can trace an intention of blessing or a lesson of faith, then even in the casting down, there is a certain lifting up. The consciousness of such a lesson or intention springing out of *God's love* would send a gleam of light into what might otherwise appear a totally dark dispensation. A ray of forgiveness would beam over just punishment; pain would be relieved by the tender care of the Good Physician, even when allowed to remain; evil would in some way gradually become changed into good.

"I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes," cried Job out of the depths of his self-abasement. Yet the sin and misery which plunged him in those deep waters of humiliation, and made him open his mouth and curse his day, also elicited from him the trust, and faith, and self-abhorrence which gave him favour in God's eyes, and caused him to be "more blessed in his latter end than in his beginning;" though in that self-same beginning the Lord had said unto Satan, "Hast thou considered My servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, *a perfect*



and an upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?" We also see Jesus, the Father's well-beloved Son, made a little lower than the angels, for the express purpose of enduring the temptations of the Devil, as well as suffering and death, in order to learn obedience. And in the garden of Gethsemane we behold a Man praying in an agony of sorrow for the removal of a cup which, since He drank of it, has become the cup of blessing to all the hosts of the redeemed.

So likewise all the mysteries of sin and sorrow and suffering now lying hidden in the inscrutable decrees of God, will doubtless be revealed as *His beneficence* in the day when we shall see things other than "through a glass darkly." Then there will be no question of the wisdom and love which suffered St. Thomas (in the face of stronger evidence than any since vouchsafed to man) to doubt the resurrection of Christ.

Tossed about, as I often am, with many a doubt, I seem to grasp an anchor of hope when I feel the possibility of my doubts forming part of the discipline by which my

faith is to be confirmed. And since my doubts, though not the same as that of St. Thomas, are yet, like his, suffered by God, I pray for grace to bring them all to Jesus, that in His infinite goodness He may resolve them, and thereby increase the faith by which I own Him as "my Lord and my God."

There is one other thought that I should like to link with St. Thomas' Day. The 21st of December, on which it falls, is reputed the shortest day in all the year. If, therefore, in the course of our threescore years and ten, some days of doubt must enter, may we not hope that each will prove only a St. Thomas' Day, and *the shortest* in our lives?

Adieu, dear friend, and I trust that nothing will ever give you cause to doubt the sincere love and affection of

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

THANKFULNESS.

O God, who, through the preaching of the blessed Apostle St. Paul, hast caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world ; Grant, we beseech thee, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, may show forth our thankfulness unto thee for the same, by following the holy doctrine which he taught ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,

The Conversion of St. Paul, January 25.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

For the topic of this letter I have chosen from the holy doctrine of St. Paul a sweet and most useful lesson, which, though taught by him very distinctly, is often overlooked. I mean the duty of thankfulness.

I think the “General Thanksgiving” in the Book of Common Prayer, is one of the most beautiful portions of the Morning Service, of which it usually forms a part. In it, and in

the Collect for to-day, thankfulness is pointed out as a practical duty. In both we pray that "we may show forth our thankfulness not only with our lips, but in our lives." St. Paul teaches many doctrines that give cause to his disciples for thanksgiving to redound to the glory of God, but it is not my purpose to enumerate them now. I merely select one or two instances of St. Paul's personal thankfulness as examples to be widely followed, and for which, at this particular hour, I feel a certain predilection.

First, then, I am thankful to St. Paul that over and over again in prayer he recalls with thanksgiving the growing faith, the abounding charity, the fervent brotherly love, the self-denying piety, of the Philippians, Ephesians, Thessalonians, Colossians, &c., who were beloved by him. Their virtues proved a source of thankfulness, a well-spring of the purest joy to him.

As I am writing to my best earthly friend, I may candidly own that in my opinion it is a delightful thing to be able to thank God for the goodness of those we love, or in whom we are specially interested. Surely there

can hardly be any greater earthly joy than to know that they who have won our best affections are worthy to be loved. And seeing that every virtue or grace possessed by them is the gift of God, we ought to render thanks to Him that they are kept by the power of God "sincere and without offence," shining as lights in the world, blameless, harmless, without rebuke as sons of God; and show forth our thankfulness for their example by following the doctrine of such holy lives.

Next to the joy of loving the good, comes the happiness of being cared for by them. Therefore, after joining St. Paul in thanking God for all that is Christlike in those who are dear unto us, I turn with rejoicing to read how he also thanked God for putting an earnest care for others, into the heart of Titus. For when I am kneeling before God, and call to mind any kindness, or help, or pleasure received during the day, I like to thank God *for having put it into the heart* of this or that friend to give it. From one came the cheering word, or the dear loving letter, or the kindly admonition and counsel;

from others, the ministry of gentle deeds, tokens of sympathy or consideration, pleasant courtesies, timely help, &c. Are not all these things, however trifling in themselves, infinitely precious when they come from hearts moved by God to care earnestly for us? Is there a sweeter assurance of God's love than this—" *He careth for you?*" And is not every care bestowed on us by a friend a fresh proof of God's own tender care, and, as such, should put a new song of thankfulness into our mouths?

I am not willing now to touch upon the unspeakable gift of a Saviour, of a Comforter, of a Father, and an inheritance in heaven, or of the covenant mercies of creation, redemption, sanctification, and glorification, all of which demand from us a perpetual Eucharist, or giving of thanks. I am drawing the duty of thankfulness only through the little human rills flowing from the ocean of Divine Love.

But there are two verses in the Bible which make me think that all thankfulness is meant to be part of a very solemn and continual sacrifice of praise. The first verse

is from Ephesians v. 20—"Giving thanks always for all things unto God." *Always?* "In all time of our tribulation" as well as "in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death," and in the days of our chastisement on earth;—*always?* dear Lord.

For all things? For the bereavements, the griefs that sap the mind, the losses, and pains, and failures, and grievous sicknesses, and fatal mistakes, and various calamities of life? *For all things?* dear Lord.

A swift answer is given in 1 Thess. v. 18. "In *everything* give thanks, for *this*"—namely, to give thanks *in everything*—"this is the will of God concerning you." And "we know that *all* things work together for good to them that love God."

Ah! dear, what room in our lives does this duty of thankfulness leave for the sin of murmuring at *any* of God's dealings with us? Shall we not rather seek daily to discharge the duty and offer the sacrifice, that when, through God's mercy, we mingle with the great multitude who through great tribulation enter the temple of God, we may join in the song, "Blessing, and glory, and

wisdom, and *thanksgiving* be unto our God for ever and ever?" Here, and now, I can swell the volume of earthly thanksgiving with the joy of knowing that I am ever—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.

LABOUR AND PRAYER.

Almighty and everliving God, we humbly beseech thy Majesty, that, as thy only-begotten Son was this day presented in the Temple in substance of our flesh, so we may be presented unto thee with pure and clean hearts, by the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin,
February 2.*

MY DEAR FRIEND,—

The result of my meditations on the services of the Church for to-day, is a renewal of the belief that the inestimable blessings of labour and prayer, are foremost among the human means ordained by God for human purification on earth.

All Christians have some experience of the purifying influence of prayer. For the prayer that is not followed by more diligent obedience to God's commandments is but a

taking of God's name in vain, and no prayer at all. We cannot pray in sincerity, "*Thy* will be done," and then choose to 'do our own will, or murmur against God's. We dare not pray, "Lead us not into temptation," and then persistently walk in the way of it. Consequently all real prayer for conformity to God's will, for the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, for the cleansing away of all sin by the blood of Jesus, and the creation of a new and clean heart, must of necessity be a daily washing of the true believer in Christ. Also, there can be no doubt that labour, whether manual or intellectual, is one of the greatest safeguards a man or woman can have against most of the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we do not wish to see a bushel filled with chaff, common prudence would not leave it empty, but seek to fill it brimful of wheat, so as to leave no room for the chaff. In other words, if we do not wish the devil to find us at leisure to do his mischief, our time should be fully occupied in doing God's work, and then we shall have none left, in which to serve the devil.

Jesus specially invites all who labour to come unto Him when they need rest, but urges all His followers to work, and to walk in the light as long as it lasts ; and He vouchsafes to set before them the example of His own and His Father's energy. (" My Father worketh hitheto, and I work," John v. 17.) The first chapter of Genesis is a revelation of God's works, and in the last chapter of the Bible Jesus says, " Behold, I come quickly ; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as *his work shall be.*" And Jesus links prayer with labour when He teaches us to pray, " Give us this day our daily bread ;" for, though God is the world's Bread-giver, He demands the work of many human hands, before a single loaf can be placed upon the table. Moreover, the Apostle St. Paul declares " that if any would not work, neither should he eat."

The relation between labour and purification is illustrated by the portions of Scripture read in church to-day. Passing over the First Lesson (Exod. xiii.), which has a special significance and interest for every firstborn child, I refer particularly to the Lessons

from Haggai (ii. to ver. 10) and Matt. (xviii. from ver. 21). The Old Testament Lesson calls attention to the work done by the body; the New Testament portion dwells on the more difficult work to be accomplished by the spirit.

The command transmitted by the Prophet Haggai is very clear. After reproving the people for neglecting to build the Lord's house, and inciting them to delay no longer, he, as the Lord's messenger, delivers the Lord's message:—"Be strong, all ye people, and *work*; for *I am with you*." Then the Lesson taken from the New Testament proceeds to show the spiritual labour and self-sacrifice required from us by our neighbour. While Haggai teaches us that God requires at our hands bodily labour in His service, St. Matthew repeats our Lord's instructions and command for the fulfilment of a duty towards our neighbour, namely, the constant forgiveness (and consequent forgetting) of all offences, until and beyond the "seventy-times seven."

From the Epistle and Gospel for the day we may learn that the union of labour and

prayer not only brings purification to the Christian, but also with it the highest blessing of purification—the seeing of God. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

At the time of the presentation of Christ in the Temple, the sight of the infant Saviour was made the reward of purity of heart and devotion to good works.

Simeon was led by the Spirit into the Temple that he might see the Light of the world—the glorious sight for which he had waited through a long life.

And Anna the prophetess, who always dwelt in the Temple, and spent her days in fasting, and praying, and looking for the promised Messiah, gave thanks that her life of prayer had been crowned by the joy of beholding her Redeemer and King on earth.

I like to think of Simeon as typical of the masculine and feminine *Marthas* in the world, and of Anna as the representative of the *St. Johns* or *Marys*. There is no Scriptural warrant for such an idea beyond the mention of Anna's strictly religious life, and the supposition that Simeon while living at

Jerusalem followed the usual avocations of a man in the world.

Pardon, however, this little wayside flight of imagination, just as I was about to quote a verse in which purification seems linked with labour, and with the hope of seeing God. St. John writes, "We shall see God as He is, and every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Can you imagine, dear friend, what it will be to see God *as He is*, to see the face of the King when His countenance shineth as the sun in his strength? "A little while," said Jesus, "and ye shall see Me." This is, I know, your hope, and it being also mine, I need to remember as faithfully as you do that "every man that hath this hope *purifieth himself*." And may we never forget that "even a child is *known by his doings*, whether his *work be pure*, and whether it be right." That *our work* may always be known as pure and right, is the hearty desire of—

YOUR DEAR PLACIDA.



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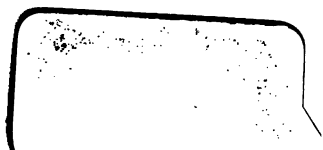
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